



Maricopa County

News Release

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Supervisor Wilcox reaches out to Corn Peddlers and other Mobile Food Vendors to educate about Permits

Maricopa County Supervisor Mary Rose Wilcox detailed today efforts conducted by the County for un-permitted corn peddlers and other un-permitted mobile food vendors to operate in compliance with Maricopa County Environmental Health Code. Wilcox expressed that the County has taken a more intense approach on educating the food vendors about the importance of working with a permit and abiding to the health codes. "We are taking a more aggressive lead in identifying the corn peddlers and food vendors that are not in compliance. As part of our efforts, Maricopa County inspectors have teamed-up with members of the Hispanic community who have gone through the permitting process, to help us better bring the message to those operators that need to comply." Wilcox said in many cases there are cultural factors that need to be considered. "Many of the Corn Peddlers and Mobile Food Vendors don't follow the law because they don't understand that here in the U.S. and in Maricopa County we have health rules and requirements that are different than those from their countries of origin", added Wilcox.

Over the past several years, Maricopa County has noted a dramatic increase in the number of un-permitted mobile food vendors within residential neighborhoods and parks. In various locations, un-permitted mobile food vendors utilize bicycles or shopping carts to carry their food. They load up the front section of the bike or cart with food products, and ride through neighborhoods for sale. The increased un-permitted mobile food presence prompted a significant increase in related citizen complaints pertaining to: food product sanitation, food safety, health risks, and neighborhood quality of life factors.

To combat the problem of un-permitted mobile food peddling, Maricopa County has been implementing different efforts, including the Intergovernmental Mobile Food Compliance Sweeps. Maricopa County developed the Intergovernmental Mobile Sweeps Program in collaboration with other government entities to address jurisdictional challenges and solve related citizen complaints.

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During the Intergovernmental Sweeps, Environmental Health Specialists look for food peddlers that are un-permitted, embargo potentially hazardous food, and provide them with information on how to obtain proper permits and assistance from Maricopa County. Sweeps are conducted monthly with agency officials who possess regulatory control over particular problems. By working together, different agencies efficiently address the entire range of regulatory issues and deter un-permitted vendors from operating. “Since program inception, 25% fewer citizen complaints are received, 20% less un-permitted food peddlers are documented and mobile unit food embargos have decreased 24%”, stated John Power, Director of the Maricopa County Environmental Services Department. Through its programs, permitting process, and inspections, the Maricopa County Environmental Services department promotes the health and safety of the community. It is the Department’s goal to prevent and remove risks associated with unsafe food operations.

Each year millions of people in the United States experience foodborne illness. These illnesses are attributable to five risk factors: food from unapproved sources, inadequate cooking, improper holding temperatures, contaminated equipment, and poor personal hygiene. Frequently, all five factors are identified in un-permitted peddler operations. Maricopa County Environmental Services Inspectors have noted potentially hazardous food cooked in backyards with significant fly harborage, odors from food waste accumulation and a lack of hand washing or temperature control. Equipment used to hold and serve food is not properly cleaned and is routinely found in backyards stored on the ground contaminated by dirt, pests, flies, pets or animal droppings. Harmful chemicals from galvanized metal buckets and empty chemical containers, commonly used to prepare the food, create additional hazards.

Maricopa County is concerned with the health risks associated with the non-permitted corn peddlers and other similar mobile food vendors operations not in compliance with the Maricopa County Environmental Health Code, and without proper regulation. “It is important that the corn peddlers and other mobile food vendors know that we are dedicating a good share of time and resources to help them in getting the proper permits and assistance, but if they don’t comply, they could be facing strong enforcement penalties”, emphasized Wilcox.

For more information on the Mobile Food Vendors and other Food Handlers programs, Permitting process, Food Handler’s card, etc., call (602) 506-6611 or visit www.maricopa.gov/envsvc/ . Information and assistance is provided in both, English language and Spanish.

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